

'On Analysis'

It sometimes feels like you can order whichever Nietzsche you want. Kurt Tucholsky thought so: "Tell me what you need and I'll sort you a Nietzsche quotation for it!" Virtually unknown during the sane, productive part of his life (ending in 1889), Nietzsche exploded on the scene in the next decade to stake his claim as the greatest Rorschach test of Western cultural history. But Nietzsche interpretation was never just a matter of haphazard, individual readings. There were trends. First, Nietzsche joined and inspired assorted pre-war, avant-garde dreamers: had the half-crazed seer not written for artists of life, the coming "Supermen", those who were not of their time? Then the nationalist Nietzsche followed German soldiers into the trenches: "the free man", he wrote, "is a warrior". Humiliated, the post-Versailles Nietzsche was recruited by the Nazis: had he not admired the "instinct" which claimed that Germany had "enough Jews" and could "digest" no more? Had he not written that his "European problem" was the "breeding of a new caste that will rule Europe"? That one needed to "excise" the "degenerate parts of an organism" lest the whole thing should perish, concluding that "equal rights for the ill-constituted" would be "immoral"?

After the Second World War, Nietzsche was horrified: he hadn't meant it like that. He sailed the Atlantic to become an inoffensive humanist. Look, he praised the Jews and hated the anti-Semites of his day! As the century grew old, he settled in France as a "deconstructionist". He admired Pontius Pilate's question: "What is truth?" He had an answer: "truths are illusions". Stephen Aschheim, in his magisterial 1992 survey of German Nietzsche interpretation, wrote that the predominant contemporary Nietzsche was deconstructionist. But by then Nietzsche had begun his next move: he was becoming a so-called "analytic philosopher". Since then – at least in philosophy departments in English-speaking universities – that is what he has become.

For this metamorphosis, Nietzsche could use some of his practised techniques: he shed or emphasized certain phrases, influences and projects. But there were new challenges. Analytic philosophers attack and defend well-defined theories in cold, unlovely, jargoned prose: "I will defend a modified Jonesian nominalism against Smith's first objection". Nietzsche was

an excitable writer of fictions, essays, poems, polemics, histories, fragmentary aphorisms and songs. Analytic philosophy, typically, reveres mathematics and natural science. Nietzsche was capable of this, but capable, too, of the opposite. Analytic philosophy is broadly ahistorical in outlook and finds no special place for the arts. Nietzsche was a trained historian and musician, whose history of morality inspired Max Weber and Michel Foucault, and whose own major influence, arguably, was Richard Wagner. Analytic philosophy is an anglophone movement, for which specific, nineteenth-century German problems – What is Germanness? What is the significance of Bismarck? – are quarrels in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing. Nietzsche was, heart and soul, a brilliant nineteenth-century German. Analytic philosophy favours clear definition. Nietzsche once wrote that only that which has no history can be defined. He frequently uses the same term to mean completely different things. Above all, analytic philosophers kneel before the Dread God of Consistency: if you hold “P” you cannot also hold “not-P”. Yet Nietzsche appears more open, explicitly, to the benefits of taking up contradictory positions. In any case, he often contradicts himself.

The analytic Nietzsche must be seen in this light. His early efforts were particularly concerned with undermining the “no-truth” readings of the deconstructionists: viewed in context, the “mature” Nietzsche was not so radical about truth. As for science, Nietzsche became a “naturalist”: roughly, his philosophy was not anti-science and was perhaps best understood as working in tandem with natural scientific inquiry. And while he seemed inconsistent in places, his “considered position” (what he would think if he had thought about it more, or better, and therefore hadn’t published some inconvenient sentences) was not inconsistent on fundamental points. “Theories” emerged from Nietzsche, comparable in kind to those of analytic philosophers, whose interests, aims and methods were not different from his. Often, his analytic lieutenants inform their readers that either Nietzsche held such-and-such a very complicated, exegetically speculative “theory” or he was simply inconsistent. Fear of the second option is meant to compel the reader into the awkward embrace of the first: your money or your life.

While it contains occasional traces of earlier or other Nietzsches and some biographical contributions, the recently published, 800-page Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche may be seen as a victory monument to Nietzsche's latest reinvention: it would only be a slight exaggeration to say that this is a handbook to analytic Nietzsche scholarship alone. The fact that it does not say so is also telling: the sign of a victorious mode of interpretation is that it need not present itself as a mode of interpretation. Of course, to call the analytic Nietzsche a mode of interpretation is not to deny its considerable virtues, nor to imply that all modes are equal: it may be the best. It wins, hands down, on clarity of expression and conceptual complexity. Compare the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's recently translated speech (from 2000), *Nietzsche Apostle*, which is nothing if not non-analytic. There are some provocative moments and pleasing turns of phrase in Sloterdijk's brief, stylized, semi-historical meander through Nietzsche, language and narcissism. Still, you will search the Handbook's pages in vain for a sentence which reads anything like: "Nietzsche's interests are directed at a theory of the penetrated penetration, an ethics of overflowing into and entering into others, a logic of absorption and of new-radiation". Edited by two eminent professors, both involved from early on in the analytic Nietzsche project, the Handbook is an excellent collection, indispensable for Nietzsche scholars working in this tradition, with contributions from the big-hitters covering many major works and themes. The most successful papers, of which there are plenty, set out, critically, clearly and generously, the various major positions that have been taken (by other analytic scholars) or chromatograph his many-coloured thoughts. Some authors can't help pushing their personal and sometimes highly eccentric lines. The best balance critical overview with authorial personality. This is where to go to find out what the analytic Nietzsche has to say.

As such, it is no surprise what is left out, what is magnified and what, occasionally, gets distorted. There is little, for example, about Nietzsche on Germany, the Jews or race. He wrote about all, especially the former, a great deal. In an essay by one of the editors, Nietzsche is quoted as follows: "In the present age human beings have in their bodies the heritage of multiple origins, that is opposite and not merely opposite drives and value standards that fight each other and rarely permit each other any rest". Nietzsche's sentence

actually begins: “In an age of disintegration that mixes races indiscriminately, human beings . . .”. For whatever reason, the quotation is altered, omitting the reference to mixing races. Wagner gets a paltry few pages. The contribution on *The Birth of Tragedy* – Nietzsche’s first book, often an embarrassment to the analytic Nietzsche and, occasionally, to the real, older Nietzsche – spends four pages on the book itself, before lingering on more comfortable later works. It deserves more, as Paul Raimond Daniels’s new introduction – *Nietzsche and the Birth of Tragedy* – will help the first-time reader to understand. Though Nietzsche influenced a glittering array of artists, writers, non-analytic philosophers and social scientists, just one paper in the Handbook is dedicated to Nietzsche’s influence: “Influence on analytic philosophy”. It is hard to avoid the implication that this is the only influence worth having; it is equally hard to imagine Nietzsche agreeing. As for the French Nietzsche: Derrida is not in the Handbook’s comprehensive index. Compare *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* of 1996, with its paper on Nietzsche’s twentieth-century influence (Heidegger, Mann, Foucault) and a dedicated essay on the “French Nietzsche”. Vestiges of the fight against the French Nietzsche are visible in frequent attempts to play down Nietzsche’s apparently radical, truth-sceptical claims: as always, some of this downplaying is effective, some tenuous, some desperate. Nietzsche wrote that science gives us “the insight into delusion and error as a condition of cognate and sensate existence”. One commentator, attempting to minimize Nietzsche’s error-talk, simply rids himself of this troublesome sentence.

Nietzsche’s view of history receives little attention in the Handbook. But it is the subject of Anthony Jensen’s *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of History*. Jensen shows himself immersed in Nietzsche’s cultural and philosophical background to a higher degree than many more established scholars. Not a book for non-specialists, his is an excellent book for scholars, giving a broadly chronological account of the nature and development of Nietzsche’s thinking about an under-discussed topic. Jensen has two modes: one is to explain, in detail, where Nietzsche got his ideas from; the other is to offer speculative reconstructions of his views, typically using contemporary analytic-philosophical formulations. As to the first, for example, Nietzsche may have conceived of himself as writing *The Birth of Tragedy* using Schopenhauerian “intuition”: direct, genius-driven insight into the unchanging essence of a

thing. As to the second, Jensen argues that Nietzsche became an “ontological realist” and a “representational anti-realist” about history: roughly, he thought the past was real but historical accounts do not correspond to, reproduce or “re-present” that reality.

Nietzsche often asked, of high-effort, truth-seeking practices like science or scholarship: are they worth it? Couldn't getting it wrong, under certain circumstances, be better for us? For obvious reasons, these are troubling questions for Nietzsche scholars. Suppose Jensen is right about Nietzsche using Schopenhauerian intuition. For one thing, rightly, nobody takes Schopenhauerian intuition seriously any more. Even if they did, as Jensen knows, “using” intuition for writing history would butcher it beyond recognition. Schopenhauer connects intuitions with unchanging essences, whereas history, he thought, dealt with what changes over time. So Jensen makes a plausible but contentious claim about Nietzsche's methodology which, if true, makes Nietzsche look foolish. Jensen does not use “intuition” to provide a particular reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Daniels does and, as it happens, his analysis begins to struggle just there. As to Nietzsche's purported representational anti-realism: if we buy Jensen's interpretation, our reward is that Nietzsche cryptically expressed an early, undeveloped glimmer of a view that became popular among some philosophers in the 1980s. This has antiquarian interest for Nietzsche-antiquarians like me, who will be grateful for Jensen's thorough contribution. But, whatever Jensen's own intention, the analytic Nietzsche can hardly expect to impress contemporary philosophers by producing, now, theories which they have already known about for decades.

As for whether he does impress them, the jury is out. Unlike many previous Nietzsche incarnations, the analytic Nietzsche finds himself on the periphery. The Nazi Nietzsche was a Nazi pin-up; the First World War Nietzsche was, with Goethe and the Bible, the most popular author among German soldiers. Analytic philosophers rarely cite Nietzsche; he is hardly allowed into the clubhouse except on festive occasions and even then only when accompanied by an adult. Often, the adult in question is a quirky one. Many of the figures in the Handbook's “influence” essay, while hugely respected, have enjoyed a certain critical outsider status: Bernard Williams, Richard Rorty, Alasdair MacIntyre. Rorty, in the end, preferred not to work in a philosophy department. Williams thought that Nietzsche was not a

source of philosophical theories – which, if true, would throw into doubt much of the analytic Nietzsche’s hard work.

So let’s return to Nietzsche’s question: what is the value of this practice? For many philosophers, enthusiasts and Nietzsche scholars, the analytic Nietzsche muffles him or sucks the life from his living words. Frequently, indeed, those words are treated with unartistic licence, especially when a new “theory” is scented. But that might not matter if one thought the results were worth it by some other standard. We may have to wait and see about that. Meanwhile perhaps it is up to those who find the analytic Nietzsche objectionably distorted to give us not just their own undistorted Nietzsche, but also some sense of his value. That may be the one thing needful before Nietzsche, as he surely will, reinvents himself again.

Books reviewed:

Ken Gemes and John Richardson, editors

The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche

816pp. Oxford University Press. £95 (US \$150).

978 0 19 953464 7

Peter Sloterdijk

Nietzsche Apostle

Translated by Steve Corcoran

104pp. MIT Press. Paperback, £9.95 (U \$12.95).

978 1 584 35099 6

Paul Raimond Daniels

Nietzsche and 'The Birth of Tragedy'

240pp. Acumen. Paperback, £50.

978 1 84465 242 6

Anthony K. Jensen

Nietzsche's Philosophy of History

250pp. Cambridge University Press. £55 (US \$90).

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